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PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONING OF THE SOVIET SOLDIER.(U)
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STUDENT RESEARCH REPORT

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PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONING OF THE SOVIET
SOLDIER

-1974-

GARMISCH, GERMANY

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FOREWORD

This research project represents fulfillment of a student requirement for successful completion of Phase III Training of the Department of the Army's Foreign Area Officer Program (Russian).

Only unclassified sources are used in producing the research paper. The opinions, value judgments and conclusions expressed are those of the author and in no way reflect official policy of the United States Government; Department of Defense; Department of the Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff of Intelligence; Department of the Army; or the U. S. Army Russian Institute.

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SUMMARY

↘ Combat on the modern battlefield places tremendous demands upon soldiers of all ranks, services, and responsibilities. Not only must they possess the combat-technical skills necessary to cope with a well-armed, equipped, and trained enemy, but also they must be "steeled" psychologically with the courage, self-control, and the will to engage the enemy and defeat him regardless of the cost. The process of psychological hardening of the Soviet soldier is the theme of this paper. Specifically, the author describes the conditioning process as a "system" of training and educational activities employed by the Soviet Army to prepare its soldiers mentally, morally, and spiritually for combat.

↙

INTRODUCTION

Psychological training or "conditioning" of Soviet soldiers for combat is defined as:

...the formation in soldiers of psychological qualities which make them capable of acting in the dangerous, tense conditions of contemporary war and of executing their combat mission...

This concept of preparing soldiers psychologically for battle is neither new nor unique to the Soviet Army. The tremendous emphasis which is currently being placed on psychological training by the Soviet military leadership, however, is unique. This emphasis stems from the Soviet view of modern nuclear warfare. Colonel M. Korobeinikov suggests that:

Modern warfare makes special demands on the soldier's psyche, the character of his behavior, his emotional and volitional endurance and his personal qualities. This is because in modern combat the fighting man's psyche is subjected to enormous stresses.²

Major-General Korf emphasizes this point:

The use of new complicated equipment and weapons of great destructive force is intensifying the influence of military weapons on the psychology of personnel and increasing the danger of confusion and panic on a much greater scale than in previous wars.³

The basic position on this subject most often found in Soviet military publications is the view that the Soviet soldier will be unable to cope psychologically with the stresses of modern combat without first undergoing a process of psychological "steeling" or conditioning.⁴

¹General-Colonel A. S. Leptov, et al., The Soldier and War. (Moscow: Military Publishing House, 1971), p. 16.

²Colonel M. Korobeinikov, "The Soldier and War," Soviet Military Review, Vol. 2 (February, 1973), p. 28.

³General-Major N. Korf and Colonel A. Razuvaev, "Concerning Psychological Preparation of Student Officers," Voennyi Vestnik, No. 9 (September, 1972), p. 50.

⁴Author's note: Another factor which very likely supports this view is the realization that the Soviet Army has virtually no contemporary combat experience.

Based upon the perceived need, the Soviet military has developed a program of psychological conditioning which is employed today to create soldiers who possess the requisite battlefield characteristics. In concept, the program is uncomplicated yet pervasive. It is based on the principle that psychological preparation is not an independent form of military training. Rather, it is exercised in "all instruction and work...."⁵ General of the Army Yepishev stresses this point:

...there should be no sharp boundary between moral and political education, combat and psychological training. These elements form the integral process of educating in the men the lofty moral, political and psychological qualities ensuring the accomplishment of combat missions in modern war. They are all closely interconnected and interdependent and pursue a common aim -- to produce an active effect on the mind, the psyche, to educate highly conscious, daring and resolute fighting men distinguished by strong will-power.⁶

In Marshal Sokolovsky's words:

...the crucial principle of instruction is to teach the troops what they need for war, and to prepare them for operations in the complex and difficult environment of future war. The successful solution of this problem is possible only through strict observance of the principle of the unity of military and political instruction and training...⁷

A unitary program in which all aspects of training and education are integrated and are related is the essence of the psychological conditioning process. This suggests that the problem might be viewed as a "system" of activities.

Webster defines system as a "set or arrangement of things so related or connected as to form a unity or organic whole."⁸ In order to qualify as a system then, three criteria must be met:

⁵Colonel A. Bazanov, "Psychological Training of Soldiers," Soviet Military Review, Vol. 8 (August, 1966), p. 16.

⁶General of the Army Yepishev. Quoted in Colonel V. Khobotov, "Psychological Stealing of Soldiers," Soviet Military Review, Vol. 3 (March 1973), p. 46.

⁷Marshal V. D. Sokolovsky, Soviet Military Strategy, 3rd edition. (Moscow: Military Publishing House, 1968), p. 310.

⁸"System," Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition (1968), p. 1480.

1. Existence as a unit or whole
2. Components
3. An organic relationship between components.

Since the conditioning process does meet these criteria, it qualifies as a "system."

In the discussion that follows, the "system" will form the framework of analysis. It will provide a more appropriate vehicle to convey the sense of singleness of purpose which the Soviets attach to their military training program, and concurrently, it will emphasize the dynamics of the psychological tempering process.

THE SYSTEM - AN OVERVIEW

A system performs a function. An electrical system, for example, consists of a network of wires, circuits, switches, lights, outlets, etc., which performs the basic function of providing a consumer with electrical energy in a usable form. The Soviet psychological conditioning system performs the basic function of developing within Soviet soldiers:

...mental qualities which will increase their ability to execute combat missions in difficult and dangerous situations, to endure any nervous and physical stresses, to display self-control and staunchness at critical moments, to act with courage and initiative in combat, and to use their weapons and other combat equipment with due efficiency.⁹

The product resulting from the process is in short a reliable, courageous, decisive soldier who possesses the qualities of self-control, initiative and mental endurance.

Figure 1 portrays graphically the system in operation and how the function is performed.¹⁰ The core activity is the process of attitudinal and behavioral change and is represented by an irregular circular figure. This indicates that the process is dynamic and consists of many forces constantly in flux all of which are acting on and reacting to the other forces. Additionally, the process of change is taking place at many qualitative levels within the minds of men of diverse backgrounds, capabilities, intelligence levels and, of course, attitudinal and perceptual levels.

The system is activated and subsequently maintained by the application of various stimuli or "inputs" according to the Irish-Prothro model (see note #10). These stimuli are represented by arrows leading toward the core. All of these can be grouped generally into three categories:

⁹ Khobotov, op. cit.

¹⁰ The system discussed here is based upon the model developed by Irish and Prothro in: Marian D. Irish and James W. Prothro, The Politics of American Democracy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 6-51.

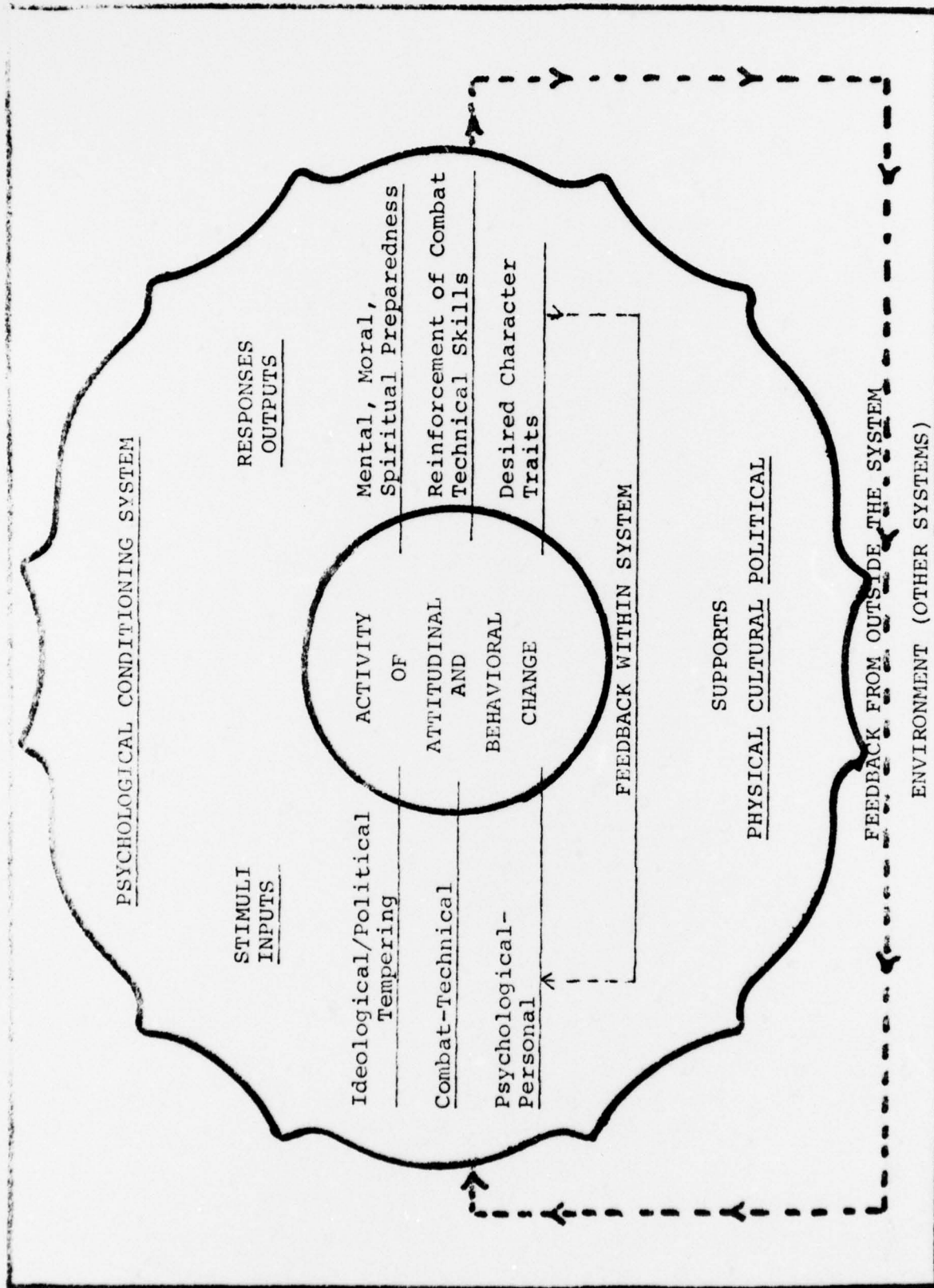


FIGURE 1. PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONING SYSTEM

1. Ideological-political
2. Combat-technical
3. Psychological-personal.

The responses to the stimuli or the "outputs" from the activity of psychic change are represented by arrows emanating from the core. These responses are fairly predictable, the Soviets believe, and represent soldiers who possess the mental, moral and spiritual preparedness and the requisite personal traits to perform effectively on the battlefield. The degree to which soldiers possess these characteristics varies of course in direct relationship to their susceptibility to the stimuli. The broken line labelled "feedback" within the system is intended to show that a relationship exists between the response and the soldier's susceptibility to new stimuli, as well. Theoretically, if the system is operating effectively a soldier will attain a level of conditioning at which point the activity becomes one of maintaining attitude levels and behavioral patterns at a prescribed amplitude. This factor would determine the intensity with which additional stimuli were applied. A soldier who had not reached the requisite standard of consciousness could be recycled at the initial intensity levels of stimuli.

A solid line encircles the entire system. It is drawn irregularly to suggest that the limits of the system are finite yet the system operates within an environment consisting of countless other systems. The foundation of the system consists of three major supports. These are identified here as the physical environment, the cultural context and the political context. Physical differences do exist between men and both perceptions and conduct vary as functions of these physical differences. Ethnic differences and the effect of the natural environment on men also influence the rates and intensities of psyche change. Thus, "culture," or the way a person thinks, believes and feels also affects the manner in which the system functions.¹¹ The political context, or the manner in which

¹¹Clyde Kluckhohn, Mirror for Man: The Relationship of Anthropology to Modern Life. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1949), p. 23.

power or influence are sought, exercised and preserved in the Soviet Union, tends to act much as a catalyst would in a chemical reaction, i.e. speeds up the reaction without itself undergoing any permanent change. All three of these supports amplify not only the core activity but also the stimuli and responses. The old adage "We are products of our environment..." applies.

THE COMPONENTS OF THE SYSTEM

The three general areas of stimulus-input have already been identified as:

1. Ideological-political
2. Combat-technical
3. Psychological-personal.

In the area of Ideological-political training, it is significant to note that the Soviet leadership invests substantial amounts of state resources in the process of tempering their soldiers in the Soviet heritage and instilling within them the Communist ethic. Marshal of the Soviet Union, Rodion Ya. Malinovsky, while serving as Minister of Defense, wrote:

The serviceman's clear awareness of the justice of war against the Imperialist aggressors, and of the loftiness of his aims, his love for and faithfulness to his people, and his hatred for the enemy provide a reliable spiritual basis for a high morale of troops. Ideological motives ensure the activeness and purposefulness of all activities of men, NCO's, officers, generals and admirals, help them to overcome fear in combat and muster the courage to do their duty.¹²

This is reinforced by the observation that:

...the basis of the soldier's psychological staunchness in battle, his readiness to cope with hardships of life on the battlefield, a source of heroism and self-denial, is his conscious attitude, ideological convictions. At a decisive moment such a soldier will display resourcefulness and resoluteness and find inner power. But the man who has not been tempered ideologically will see dangers everywhere even where there are none. Unwillingly he becomes a slave of fear and easily succumbs to base emotions.¹³

The basis of ideological tempering is political education. This program of education:

¹² Marshal of the Soviet Union Rodion Ya. Malinovsky, "Moral and Psychological Preparation of Servicemen Under Contemporary Conditions," Kommunist Vooruzhenykh Sil, Vol. 12 (December, 1965), p. 18.

¹³ Bazanov, op. cit., p. 17.

...equips servicemen ideologically, reveals their obligations towards their country and shows that the service in the Soviet Armed Forces is the Soviet citizen's exalted and honorable duty.¹⁴

Furthermore, the Soviets believe:

...the better the ideological conditioning of the servicemen and the more clearly they realize the just purposes and missions of our Armed Forces and our country's policy in general, the better they perform their duties, the quicker they master combat skills and the more conscientious their services become.¹⁵

All Soviet soldiers are required to attend political classes. Most attend two two-hour classes each week; however, some naval units attend only one three-hour class. Study groups form the basis of instruction and are organized according to years of service. Each group consists of approximately 20 to 25 soldiers. The program of instruction is designed to introduce the serviceman to a comprehensive program of political knowledge during his period of service. The lecture-seminar method of instruction is normally used in the classes, and soldiers are required to read assigned topics and to prepare themselves to participate in the discussions. An officer "supervises" the servicemen in their preparation and subsequently allows each one to present his views on the subject to the remainder of the group. This concept of "supervision" enhances the serviceman's ability to "analyze" effectively and to draw the appropriate "conclusions" from the discussion.

Ideological training employs a number of other means to influence attitudes and behavior. Propaganda is used widely, and the Soviet soldier is saturated with radio broadcasts, newspapers, lectures, discussion groups, films, TV programs and reading circles all of which are designed to convey the appropriate perception of the Soviet role in world affairs, recount the glorious traditions of the "Great Patriotic War"

¹⁴Colonel-General M. Kalashnik, "Political Education in the Soviet Armed Forces," Soviet Military Review, Vol. 10 (October, 1965), p. 14.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 12.

and to inspire the individual soldier to assume his place in a greater Communist destiny. The Soviet military involvement in media production to accomplish these tasks is extensive. At least 10 military-political and literary magazines not counting Krasnaya Zvezda and other dailies published in each military district are published in the Armed Forces. Additionally, the soldier has access to well over 100 periodicals which the Armed Forces subscribe to regularly.¹⁶

Propaganda is also used extensively to give examples of courage and heroism on the battlefield and training ground. A typical technique which is used in almost all Soviet publications is to cite a combat example from World War II. Usually, the stage is set against a backdrop of the "unknown." As the situation develops, the imponderables mount until a political officer arrives on the scene. Under his supervision or perhaps as a result of his charisma a junior officer or NCO regains his composure and in business-like fashion, solves the problem.

Another method employed in ideological tempering is the "cultural activity." Such activities include field trips, celebrations, parades, performances and similar events which afford the serviceman the opportunity to identify with his civilian counterpart and reaffirm his Russian heritage. More often than not, this heritage is Great Russian and does not extend beyond World War II.

No system of ideological training could be complete without a course of study in Leninism. A program entitled "Lenin Studies" is a viable part of every soldier's life. Colonel-General Kalashnik explains the program this way:

Soviet people are interested in everything connected with the name of Lenin, in his books and articles, speeches and reports, letters and talks, his style of work and his biography. Lenin is an example in everything the Soviet soldier does. However, a study of some of Lenin's philosophical, economic and political works requires a sound grounding and guidance. Lenin studies fill this need.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

Usually well-educated officers read the texts of Lenin's works selected by servicemen for studies. Then they may exchange opinions and impressions and clarify the more difficult problems. Sometimes veteran Communists who met Lenin and participated in the revolution and the Civil War are invited to these talks. Usually Lenin studies end in the showing of a film or a play dealing with the history of the Revolution,¹⁷ or listening to some records of Lenin's speeches.

Other activities which are used in the ideological tempering process are:

1. Question and answer evenings
2. Young men's forums
3. Quizzes
4. Amateur theaters
5. Cycles of lectures
6. Current politics discussion groups
7. Universities of culture.¹⁸

The second of the "stimulus-input" groups is that of combat-technical training. While it may be argued that the development of combat and combat-related skills more appropriately belongs to another system of activity, certain aspects of this training, in fact, stimulate psychological conditioning and thus are discussed here.

The Soviets believe that it has been proven time and again that as a soldier develops proficiency in combat and combat-related skills, he gains self-confidence and confidence in the tools of his trade. This increased confidence then enhances the soldier's ability to grasp more complicated skills.

Another aspect of combat-technical training is the fact that the backdrop against which combat skills are developed tends to reinforce both ideological tempering and character building. Soviets encourage training under conditions which simulate actual combat conditions. It is believed that the sounds and stresses associated with the learning of combat skills

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

are as vital as the skills themselves in moulding psychological endurance.

It has been noted that:

During tactical exercises...commanders seek to produce a model of real combat. This is achieved by simulating the external pattern (noise effects, explosions, the whistle of bullets, road blocks, fires, destruction and 'losses'), introducing an 'enemy' offering real opposition, severe physical strain and risky, even dangerous situations.¹⁹

Colonel Bazanov has suggested that in order to enable the soldier to act efficiently on the battlefield and to act courageously, the soldier must be placed in situations which force him to endure the hardships of modern war.²⁰ In his view, at critiques following training exercises:

...It is not enough to analyze only the tactical aspects of the operations. The level of the men's moral-psychological preparedness, the causes of procrastination, lack of will, and the like must also be ascertained.²¹

The Soviets place a great deal of emphasis in their combat training on the nature of future war. The view is often times expressed that precise knowledge of the character and features of future battles is vital since "fear and lack of confidence appear as a rule, when man is confronted with the unknown."²² The Soviets believe that "the difficulties and procedures involved in overcoming obstacles are registered in the soldier's memory and accumulate as a vast store of experience. Thus, in a combat situation the soldier will be able to act correctly by analogy."²³ Frequently, Soviet officers are chided in the development of training exercises "to rule out simplification... and to create crucial situations which require daring, coolness, efficiency and maximum effort" -- on the part of their troops.²⁴

¹⁹ Khobotov, op. cit., p. 47.

²⁰ Bazanov, op. cit.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Colonel N. Vasiliev, "Surmounting Fear," Soviet Military Review, Vol. 6 (June 1973), p. 55.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Another interesting technique employed by the Soviet military is that of developing the habit of expecting the unexpected.²⁵ Combat as they see it is full of surprises and men must be trained to expect surprise situations.

A strong case could probably be made to suggest that many of the factors discussed here, i.e., the "spin-offs" from the development of combat-technical training should be included in the third major "stimulus-input" category -- psychological-personal. While it is true that the aspect of combat skill development germane to this discussion is the enhancement of personal traits, it is also true that other training and community living activities enhance the development of these traits as well. The decision to use a third category was taken primarily to show that the development of personal characteristics need not be related solely nor specifically to the development of combat skills. Additionally, the fact that a grey area exists between these major categories supports an earlier observation that components of a system inter-relate.

The development of psychological-personal traits or character building presents the Soviet military with one of its most difficult contemporary problems. Character is developed early in life and later amplified and modulated across a broad spectrum of daily activities. The task of developing in the space of two years in military service qualities or patterns which are not part of the cultural context and which perhaps the individual is incapable of accommodating is monumental. The Soviet leaders recognize this fact and have developed techniques to accommodate this shortcoming. Discipline, for example, in the Soviet Army plays a much greater role than in many Western armies. The Soviet Disciplinary Regulations say that a "superior" order is a law for subordinates. The order must be carried out without demur, exactly and on time."²⁶ The emphasis on

²⁵ Lieutenant Colonel N. Severov, "Habit for the Unfamiliar," Soviet Military Review, Vol. 7 (July 1973), pp. 28-29.

²⁶ Major V. Aldarov, "Disciplinary Regulations," Soviet Military Review, Vol. 7 (July 1973), p. 39.

discipline is understandable in a society as disciplinary as Soviet society. Discipline that is too strict or demanding, however, tends to break down other qualities which are also required in the conditioned soldier, such as initiative. The Soviets seem willing to accept this risk at any rate and stress the principle that:

If a soldier has good discipline and can handle his weapons and equipment well, he acts with confidence and bravery. An order is a law to such a soldier. Many people justly consider that the commander's order removes, as it were, the feeling of fear and compels the soldier to think about one thing -- its execution. The commander's order develops into a self-order. What is demanded by the order is demanded by the soldier's sense of duty, patriotic feelings, conscience, will. An order consciously accepted by the soldier is a dependable means at his disposal to struggle against timidity and fear.²⁷

Discipline is not only imposed by law; it is also imposed upon the soldier as a moral obligation to obey. This is reinforced by the application of tremendous peer pressures on the individual who transgresses. "...the aim of compulsion is not to suppress the will of the fighting man, but to reeducate the transgressor."²⁸ It must be noted here that probably in this area more than in any other the inter-relationship between ideological training and the development of character traits is most pronounced. Party and State actively participate in the enhancement of firm discipline.

In the process of molding character and discipline the role of incentives must be examined. Peer pressure has already been alluded to. Other techniques are used effectively, as well, to motivate the correct response. Awards, decorations, banners, diplomas of honor, and pennants of various sorts are presented regularly to individuals who respond correctly. Additionally:

The commanders and political workers of the Soviet Army invariably try to inform the men about feats performed by others, about awards and commendations. Such means as bulletins, local radio stations and unit papers serve this purpose most effectively.²⁹

²⁷ Bazanov, op. cit.

²⁸ Aldarov, op. cit.

²⁹ Ibid.

An interesting aspect of character building which should be noted is the recent emphasis placed upon psychological testing of Soviet soldiers. An article appearing in Kommunist Vooruzhennykh SII discusses a battery of tests given to soldiers to measure their:

1. Level of trainability
2. Mechanical aptitude
3. Degree of command ability
4. Methodical inclination in problem solving
5. Emotional stability.³⁰

The Soviets obviously feel that a solution to the problem of developing character begins with an attempt at least to measure the quantity and quality of the desired traits already present in an individual. By implementing a process of careful psychological screening and selection the Soviets can improve the efficiency of the conditioning system significantly.

Thus far, primary emphasis has been placed on identification and discussion of the component stimuli in the system. Of equal importance is understanding the relationship that exists among these stimuli. The key point is that these forces do not function in isolation from each other. For ease of analysis it was convenient to discuss each area separately. In practice, however, all of the areas inter-relate and each has meaning only in the context of the other two areas. For example, a radio operator who has faith in his equipment might exercise great self-control when his equipment malfunctions because he is confident that he can correct the cause of the malfunction. Similarly, a soldier who has the moral conviction that his cause is just will display tremendous personal dedication and devotion to the successful accomplishment of his mission. This cross-reinforcement and integration is recognized as a vital part of the system by the Soviet military.

Another area where the manifestation of inter-relationship is evidenced is in the area of leadership. The success or failure of a soldier to respond to a stimulus often times is a

³⁰Colonel F. Kharisov and Lieutenant Colonel I. Bondarenko, "The Improvement of Psychological Selection," Kommunist Vooruzhennykh SII (July 1972), pp. 47-48.

function of the manner in which the stimulus was applied. In other words, the "who" becomes as important as the "what." The Soviets place a great deal of emphasis on the role of the commander in this area of psychological conditioning. The training of cadets, for example, includes special psychological preparation which:

Envisions and provides for the formation of high emotional stability and the preparation of officers for prolonged neural-physic pressures, which are characteristic of modern battle.³¹

Because commanders in the Soviet Army are fully responsible for the training, education and combat activity of their personnel and because the troops understand this, there seems to be greater emphasis on example than perhaps is warranted. "The superior must constantly set his subordinates an example of strict and exact observance of laws, the oath of allegiance, military regulations, orders, instructions and norms of communist ethics."³²

³¹ Korf and Razuvaev, loc. cit., p. 48.

³² Aldarov, op. cit.

CONCLUSIONS

The Soviet military leadership recognizes the need for the psychological conditioning of soldiers for combat on the battlefield of the future. This is abundantly clear to anyone who has even cursorily scanned the wealth of Soviet literature concerned with military affairs. In this regard, it is reassuring to read:

No matter how much the destructive potential of modern weapons increases, they cannot conduct warfare on their own or win the armed struggle. It is man with his spiritual and physical potential that constitutes the decisive force in war.³³

However important the recognition of the need, of greater importance is the fact that the Soviets have developed a system of training designed to accommodate the need. The system that has been developed is a pervasive one which encompasses all phases of a soldier's training and touches every aspect of his daily life. The function of the system is to provide the soldier with the correct ideological orientation, a taste for the battle he may be required to fight and those character traits which not only increase the soldier's susceptibility to other appropriate stimuli but also are required in themselves to enable him to cope with combat on the modern battlefield.

It should be noted that the system is not yet completed. It is still undergoing a process of evolution. In this context, some interesting research is being done in the area of psychological selection or the determination of the adaptability potential of soldiers to the stresses of combat. This area, of course, is one which offers greatest promise since careful screening for receptibility and susceptibility to stress would enable commanders to concentrate on those soldiers who possess the requisite qualities for further training or conditioning.

³³Khobotov, op. cit.

PROBLEM AREAS

A number of problem areas exist in the Soviet psychological conditioning system and should be noted.

1. Foremost among the problem areas is the task of measuring success or failure of the conditioning system. The purpose of conditioning is, of course, to prepare a soldier for combat. How can military leaders be certain that the program which they have implemented is in fact accomplishing this task without sending troops into combat?

2. Secondly, in the development of character traits, what limits must be imposed to ensure political reliability and at the same time provide the soldier with the initiative and freedom of action needed for warfare in the future?

3. Thirdly, since the development of character normally spans man's entire cognitive-formative period, what techniques exist which will enable commanders to instill the necessary traits in their troops during their terms of service?

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